

**Cultural Similarities and Differences in Couples’
Adjustment to Competing Family and Work Demands**

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Abstract

Conflicting work and family demands can lead to individual and interpersonal stress in close relationships. The literature suggests that individuals from various cultural contexts differ in how they organize domestic work in the family and in the support they receive from other persons. At the same time, past findings suggest effects of culture on individuals' emotional behaviors and expression, and on the regulation of negative emotions. Although these topics are likely strongly interconnected, they have rarely been considered together and the cultural differences found are insufficiently understood.

The current thesis combines five studies conducted to better understand how culture influences married partners' behavior and emotion when managing their daily life between the family and the workplace. This research is based on ambulatory assessment data from 623 dual-earner couples from eight cultural contexts. This approach provides good validity to explore individuals' daily family behavior and emotional experience. We examined working couples' family work organization, including third party's contribution, considering collectivistic values at social and individual levels. Moreover, we investigated spouses' emotional experiences under stressful everyday life conditions in different cultures, and examined the interpersonal consequences and subsequent regulation and recovery of affective experiences. The results showed that spouses in collectivistic cultures received more support from extended family, which might result in a more equal division of family work between spouses. In addition, spouses were more likely to suppress their negative emotional responses to relational stress, and these negative emotions showed more cross-over effects between spouses, while spouses needed more time to recover under relational stress in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures. Overall, the findings provided further evidence to a cultural effect on individuals' daily behavior and emotional experience in close relationships.

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¹ The 184 pages manuscript that was submitted as a doctoral thesis in May 2010 included five manuscripts. Due to copyright issues, the current text features only the abstracts and references of these manuscripts.

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Cultural Similarities and Differences in Couples' Adjustment to Competing Family and Work Demands

How couples adjust to competing or conflicting family and work demands received increasing attention from family researchers during the past decades. With the growing participation of women in the labor force, couples are required to manage competing demands for time and other resources from the family and from the professional realm. This situation requires adaptation or adjustment from spouses on at least two levels. First, they have to (re)organize the provision of basic family needs in effective ways, primarily via a functional division of family tasks among themselves and external providers. Second, they have to adapt to and cope effectively with the stresses emerging from work family conflict. Couples' adjustment to this particularly demanding situation does not evolve in a vacuum, though, and contextual factors most probably shape couples' experiences and adaptation in important ways (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000). One powerful source of contextual influences is culture.

The goal of the current research is to examine how culture influences couples' adjustment to competing work and family demands on the levels of family work organization and the couples' emotional experiences. I view culture as a "...socially constructed constellation consisting of such things as practices, competencies, ideas, schemas, symbols, values, norms, institution, goals, constitutive rules, artifacts and modification of the physical environment" (Fiske, 2002, p.85). Many studies use the dimensions of collectivism and individualism to characterize cultural variation. Collectivism reflects values and norms viewing individuals as parts of in-groups or collectives, giving priority to the goals of these collectives over individual goals, and emphasizing the connectedness among in-group members and the harmony in relationships, and individualism reflects values and norms viewing individuals as entities independent of collectives, giving priority to individual goals over the goals of collectives, and valuing rationality and interpersonal exchange (Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In the current work, cultural influence or variation was examined primarily using data from China and Switzerland to represent collectivistic and individualistic societies. To accurately assess family work division and emotional experiences, I relied on data gathered with a computer-assisted ambulatory assessment procedure as well as questionnaires. Questionnaire has been used in most previous studies to get generalized or retrospective self-report data on psychological states and experiences (e.g., Buehler, 1990). However, typical summary accounts of self-data over weeks and months tend to reflect individuals' beliefs about their behaviors and emotions rather than their actual acts and feelings in particular situations (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Perrez, Schoebi, & Wilhelm, 2000). The ambulatory assessment method used in the present studies to examine individuals' actual behavior and emotional experiences in the natural setting of family life is well suited to deal with these problems, reducing bias due to memory processes and other cognitive sources of distortions through ecologically valid assessments with minimal delay (Robinson & Clore, 2002; Perrez, Wilhelm, Schoebi, & Horner, 2001). This is an important asset and a unique strength of the current research. Questionnaires were used where appropriate, to assess individuals' cultural value beliefs in diverse societies.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will first review the literature on working couples' organization of family work in various cultures, including their support seeking from other persons with family work, and suggest several potential predictors of these cultural differences in family work organization. Then, I will focus on individuals' emotional responses to stresses and how their emotions are co-regulated in diverse societies, providing some insight on how working couples from various cultural contexts experience emotions arising in the context of competing work and family demands. Finally, I will summarize some important gaps in the literature, and introduce more specifically to the current studies, which provide some answers to the questions raised.

Couples' Organization of Family Work in Various Cultures

Empirical findings suggest that one way to adjust to women's time stress with family responsibilities is to involve husbands and children in family work or to purchase services,

such as food, house cleaning and laundry (Blair & Lichter, 1991; Brines, 1994; Cohen, 1998; Hochschild, 1997). Indeed, family work has not been viewed as exclusively women's responsibilities in most dual-earner families. In the 1990s, American husbands did about 70% of the traditional male-tasks (e.g., yard work, auto maintenance), and American wives did about 75% of the traditional female-tasks (e.g., cooking, laundry, housecleaning) (Greenstein, 2000).

In spite of husbands' increasing involvement in domestic chores, wives were found to perform a greater proportion of family work than their husbands in families where the wife earned more than the husband and even in households where the husband was not employed (Brayfield, 1992). Researchers in western societies have made efforts to find out other potential predictors than professional work time to explain two partners division of family work, such as social structure and organization factors (e.g., public childcare service) and cognition and attitude factors (e.g., gender ideologies), and organized these factors into several theoretical models, for example, time availability model, relative resource model, and gender ideology model (e.g., Coltrane, 2000; Shelton & John, 1996). Given that these models have been tested usually with samples from western individualistic cultures, researchers have called for more empirical studies involving samples from non-American and collectivistic cultures to examine the cross-cultural validity of these models (e.g., Kamo, 1994; Kohn, 1989).

Previous cross-cultural research suggests both similarities and differences in couples' division of family work in various cultures. Women remained as the main contributor to domestic chores in diverse societies (e.g., Coltrane, 2000; Moghaddam, 1998), but husbands' contribution to domestic work varied across culture (e.g., Poeschl, 2008). For example, in the United States, African-American men and Hispanic men were found to do more domestic chores than white men (Moghaddam, 1998). Japanese couples divided family work in a more traditional way than did American couples (e.g., Kamo, 1994). Davis and Greenstein (2004) found that 92.6% of husbands in their Japanese sample reported that their wives always or usually did the housework, while the figure was 64.3% in their British sample and 56.9% in the American sample.

In China, the cradle of Confucianism which has huge influence on most eastern Asian

cultures, researchers found a relatively equal allocation between husband and wife (Greer, 1992; Parish & Farrer, 2000; Stockman, Bonney, & Sheng, 1995; Wang & Li, 1982). According to the finding from Bonney, Sheng and Stockman (1992), 35% to 47% of wives in China exclusively took responsibility of four types of domestic chores, i.e. washing the dishes, cleaning the house, doing laundry, and cooking, whereas these figures ranged from 53% to 94% in Britain and were above 89% for all the chores in Japan. Moreover, less than 5% of husbands entirely or mainly performed the four chores in Britain and Japan, but these figures ranged from 9% to 20% in China.

Potential Sources of Cultural Differences in Spouses' Division of Family Work

Researchers tried to explain these cultural differences in spouses' allocation of domestic work in the theoretical framework (i.e., time availability, relative resource, and gender ideology models) which has been used in western societies, but found only partial and weak support for the validity of these models in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Davis & Greenstein, 2004; Kamo, 1994). Kamo (1994) argued that these theoretical models were based on the assumption of rational calculation in economic exchange between partners, and thus had a limitation for families in non-U.S. societies with strong traditions regarding family where decisions were likely to be made using couples, rather than spouses, as actors. Therefore, it is important to understand these traditions regarding family in collectivistic cultures in order to explain the spouses' division of family work in these societies.

A detailed introduction of Confucianism in Asia will be presented later in the first study in the current research. In this section, we will briefly review some findings of current theoretical models (e.g., time availability, relative resource, gender ideology models) in collectivistic cultures, and give some implications how the family traditions in Asian societies due to Confucianism may influence the functioning of these model. In addition to these models, we will pay attention to spouses' received help from other persons with domestic work that was found to have influence on husband's and wife's allocation of domestic work in western societies (e.g., Brines, 1994). We expect that these family traditions or traditional

Confucian values and third party's support with family work help to explain the cultural difference in spouses' division of family work in collectivistic and individualistic cultures.

Husband's and wife's performance of domestic chores should reflect their values and attitudes about family and men's and women's gender roles, that is, their gender ideology. The gender ideology hypothesis posits that a couple is more likely to divide family work in a traditional way if they hold more traditional gender role attitudes and view domestic chores as women's responsibility (e.g., Greenstein, 1996). This hypothesis received support, albeit modest, from empirical research in western societies (for a review, see Coltrane, 2000). It is supposed to be valid also in collectivistic cultural contexts where exist traditions regarding family, as suggested by Mikula (1998) that a traditional division of house work was more likely to exist when individuals had more traditional gender role attitudes and when prevailing norms in a social context prescribed a gendered allocation of men and women's responsibility.

The validity of gender ideology model is still an open question in collectivistic cultures, due to a lack of empirical studies. In a cross-cultural study using American and Japanese samples, Kamo (1994) found that time availability, resource, and gender ideology models were supported in both countries, but they were supported more strongly in the United States than in Japan. He argued that the traditional division of household work in Japanese families should be due to the normative pattern in Japanese society which made how spouses allocate domestic work a nonissue. Further support for the influence of social norms and values on spouses' domestic work contributions comes from Quah's (1994, 1998) studies in Singapore. Facing opposite expectations from traditional values regarding the roles of women and modern values of gender equality, Singaporean women were found to separate their attitudes from behaviors by thinking liberally but acting traditionally.

It becomes clear that knowledge of these traditional values is necessary to understand the couple's allocation of family work in eastern Asian societies. A key role of Confucianism is to regulate individuals' social behavior and interpersonal relationships (Zhang, 1990). Among the five core dyadic relationships in Confucianism, three are family relationships, i.e. father and son, husband and wife, and elder brother and younger (Hwang, 1999). Accordingly, Confucianism proposes concrete rules of proper conduct for these relationships and

prescribes strict gender roles for men and women. For example, men are encouraged to avoid cooking and other domestic chores and women are forbidden to join in political activities (Li, 2004).

On the other hand, Confucianism conceives family members as different parts of one body and emphasizes that members of a family should share resources with one another and resource allocators must do their best to satisfy the needs of their family members (Hwang, 1999), which fosters we-consciousness among family members. Quek and Knudson-Martin (2006) argued that some collectivistic norms, such as strong emphasis on family and we-consciousness, indirectly facilitated the process of gender equality between spouses.

Traditional Confucian values regarding gender roles were found prevailing among Chinese in 2000. According to the finding from a national survey (The second Chinese women's social status survey team, 2001), 43% of men and 37.4% of women in Shanghai agreed that women's chief responsibility was in domestic domain and men's chief responsibility was social activities, and the figures were even higher in the southern Guangdong province with an agreement percentage of 58.6% among men and about 55% among women.

Moreover, the existing literature suggests that traditional Confucian values and norms influence the way in which people interpret their work and family responsibility and demands in eastern Asian societies (Hwang, 1999; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006; Zuo & Bian, 2001). In line with Triandis' (1995) argument about an emphasis on collectives' goals in collectivistic cultures, and an emphasis on individual goals in individualistic cultures, researchers identified a family-based work ethic among Chinese (Redding, 1993; Redding & Wong, 1986). In western individualistic societies, family and personal time were valued and the interference of work with family was likely to cause dissatisfaction in other family members and decreased emotional support to the worker (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Hofstede, 1980). By contrast, Chinese were likely to give priority to work over family and personal time and tended to view this work priority as a self-sacrifice made for the benefit of the family (Redding, 1993; Shenkar & Ronen, 1987). Thus, extra work responsibilities are likely to be legitimized in Chinese societies and probably encourage support from other family members to the worker.

Due to the Confucian values, however, work orientation is hardly encouraged among women in Chinese societies. On the contrary, a woman with an “excessive” career ambition while assuming little household responsibility would be viewed as selfish, nonfeminine and irresponsible to household needs in China (Zuo & Bian, 2001). Such gender-dependent interpretation of professional activities questions the validity of resource approach, i.e. relative resource model and economic dependency model, in Chinese societies.

According to the two resource models, the partner who bring less resource (e.g., earnings, education) into the relationship or who is economically dependent on the other partner, usually the wife, is less likely to negotiate a favorite division of household labor for themselves (Brines, 1993; Shelton & John, 1996). The two models treat earnings, education and other resources as neutral to husbands and wives, which is in doubt in societies where strong traditions regarding gender roles exist. For example, Zuo and Bian (2001) found that in Beijing, social status and financial contributions brought power to the husband, and domestic work brought power for the wife. On the contrary, contributions to domestic work could hardly be turned into resources for husbands of “failed aspirations”, and salary and status were hardly able to be turned into resources for wives who rejected household responsibility.

With the increasing participation of women in the labor force, different strategies, either political solutions or economic solutions, have been developed to cope with the resulting work family conflict in dual-earner families. These strategies at social level should have influence on some variables at individual level, such as spouses’ available time for domestic work. According to the time availability approach, the partner who has more available time will contribute more to family work (Hiller, 1984). Researchers usually use profession work time to indicate how much time is available for domestic work, assuming that a negative relationship exist between professional work time and the time for domestic work (e.g., Davis & Greenstein, 2004).

In general, the time availability model received support in western societies that both husband’s and wife’s professional work time was negatively associated with their own housework time, leading to a more equal division of housework in dual-earner family (e.g., Shelton & John, 1996). Less attention has been paid to the validity of this model in Asian

societies. Based on limited empirical findings, spouses' professional work time showed generally negative association with their contributions to domestic work, but the explanatory power was relatively weak in these societies (Kamo, 1994; Sanchez, 1994; Xu & Liu, 2003; Zheng, 2006).

However, Chinese women's large amount of professional work time may give other implications about couples' division of family work. In 2003, Chinese men spent 45.8 hours per week on professional work and women spent 44.9 hours per week on professional work in urban areas (China Labor Statistical Yearbook, 2005). By contrast, Swiss men spent 30 hours per week on paid work and Swiss women spent 15 hours per week in 2004 (Federal Statistical Office, 2008).

The large amount of professional work time among Chinese couples raises the question of how Chinese husband and wife manage their family work organization with a shortage of available time. In fact, researchers found that Chinese couples' family demands were reduced by some social and family factors, for example, childcare in the workplace and support from extended family with household labor (e.g., Yang, Chen, Choi, & Zou, 2000). Though the heavy reliance on others' help with child care and other domestic chores in Chinese families has been documented in literature (Chen, Short, & Entwisle, 2000; Pan & Lin, 1987; Unger, 1993), however, less attention was paid to the influence of the third party's help on husband's and wife's division of family work in Chinese societies.

Recently, researchers in western societies showed increasing interest in the role of third party's help with domestic work in spouses' organization of family work, based on the finding that more and more families adjusted to women's time constraints for family work by purchasing services, such as house cleaning and eating out (e.g., Blair & Lichter, 1991; Brines, 1994) or seeking help from social sources, such as help exchange between parents and adult children (Eggebeen, 1992; Padgett, 1997). Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis (1991) found that 31% of part-time employed American wives used some form of paid domestic help and the figure was 37% for full-time employed wives. In general, more purchased services are associated with less available time for domestic work due to employment and more available income in the family (Oropesa, 1993; Spitze, 1999), and proximity is a key for getting help from friends and relatives (e.g., Logan & Spitze, 1996).

Researchers argued that these purchased services and help from social network may account for the decline in total time spent on household labor during the past few decades in western societies, with substantial reduction of household labor time by wives and only moderate increase of domestic work time by husbands (Brines, 1994; Presser, 1994). In addition to spouses' total domestic work time, the assistance from other persons may also influence the allocation of domestic work between husband and wife. An answer to this question is helpful to understand how family responsibilities shift in the relationship in response to outside assistance. Some argued that third party's support with domestic work was likely to reduce husbands' domestic work time and thus resulted in a more gendered division in the family (e.g., Brines, 1994; Hiller, 1984). However, this proposal has been rarely tested in empirical studies, which requires a proportion of husbands' contribution to domestic work relative to wives' contribution instead of absolute work time.

In sum, time availability, resource, and gender ideology models have been found valid in some Asian societies, but they are probably unable to explain to a satisfactory extent the cultural difference in spouses' allocation of domestic work in collectivistic and individualistic cultures. To understand couples' organization of family work in eastern Asian societies, attention should be given to the traditions and norms regarding family due to traditional Confucian values. People holding these traditional values may view and interpret their work and family responsibilities in a different way from that among people holding more individualistic values. Also, these traditional values emphasizing a close connectedness among family members may be associated with the higher level of social support, particularly from extended family, in Asian societies. Therefore, these cultural values and support from other persons are expected to help explain why couples in various cultures differ in their division of family work.

Emotional Responses to Stressful and Challenging Situations in Various Cultures

To cope with competing work and family demands, working couples must, on one hand, arrange family responsibilities in a functioning way, and on the other hand, manage and

regulate their emotional experiences in response to these stressors. The literature suggests that people who perceive more conflict and overload due to work and family roles are likely to show more emotional distress and lower subjective well-being which are associated with long-term negative consequences, e.g. negative interactions among family members (e.g., Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Gerstel & Gallagher, 1993; Paden & Buehler, 1995; Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000).

Individuals' emotional responses to stresses have been a focus in emotion research, with various indicators, for example, physiological responses, emotional behavior and expression, and reported emotional experiences (e.g., Friesen, 1972; Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Recently, some called that temporal dynamics of emotions should be given more attention in future research (Eaton & Funder, 2001; Hemenover, 2003). This proposal is based on the fact that individuals' emotional experiences usually last for a period from its onset to the recovery, ranging from seconds to days or even longer time (Germans Gard & Kring, 2007). Whereas the former kinds of emotion indicators concern individual differences in emotion awareness, intensity and reactivity to stresses, the duration indicators give an answer to the question of how individuals differ in the recovery from their emotional experiences activated by stresses.

In this section, we will briefly review the literature on both emotional responses to stresses and emotion management and recovery after stresses. Remarkably, we will adopt a cultural perspective to examine individuals' emotional experiences in diverse societies, given emotions' critical social function of guiding interpersonal relationships (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Kring, 1998). The dimensions of collectivism and individualism are used here, due to their rich guidelines for interpersonal relationships, to demonstrate how values and norms shape individuals' emotional responses and management under stresses.

Given the important social function of emotions, individuals regulate more or less their emotional expression in diverse societies (e.g., Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000; Frijda & Mesquita, 1994). In comparison with individualists, collectivists are likely to show higher level of emotional control or suppression, particularly in interpersonal situations (Friesen, 1972; Matsumoto, 2006; Mauss, Butler, Roberts, & Chu, 2009). These cultural differences in control and suppression may be associated with the interdependent versus

independent construals of the self in collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). According to this distinction, people in collectivistic culture are more likely to view themselves as part of an in-group (interdependent), give priority to group concerns over individual concerns, and value in-group harmony, while people in individualistic culture are more likely to view themselves as an entity independent of an in-group, emphasize individual concerns, and value individual authenticity expressed by emotions.

In addition, previous studies found cultural differences in individuals' reported emotional experiences. People in individualistic cultures usually reported higher level of subjective well-being and pleasant emotional experiences, e.g. happiness and pride, than people in collectivistic cultures (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). The findings about negative emotions are mixed. Some found that people in collectivistic cultures reported less negative emotions than people in individualistic cultures (e.g., Soto, Levenson, & Ebling, 2005), others found the opposite or even found no cultural differences (e.g., Oishi, 2002; Tsai, Levenson, & McCoy, 2006). To account for these conflicting findings, Mauss, Butler, Roberts, and Chu (2009) argued that situation type (e.g., interpersonal vs. non-interpersonal) and emotion type (e.g., socially engaging vs. disengaging) should be distinguished.

Given that collectivists give more attention to social relationship concerns over individual concerns, they are likely to be more sensitive to interpersonal stresses and react with stronger emotional responses, and be less sensitive to non-interpersonal stresses and react with less emotional responses, in comparison with individualists. Empirical findings partially support this proposition (e.g., Nezlek, Sorrentino, Zasnaga, Otsubo, Allen, Kouhara, & Shuper, 2008; Tsai, Chentsova-Dutton, Friere-Bebeau, & Przymus, 2002).

The distinction between socially engaging and disengaging emotions also reflects social orientation of emotions. Socially engaging emotions (e.g., friendly feelings, sadness) are those which are typically resulted from having connected the self with others in a relationship and thus promote interpersonal harmony, and socially disengaging emotions (e.g., pride, anger) are those which are typically resulted from affirming the identity of the self as a desirable entity independent of others and thus promote distinction of individuals from their social contexts (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Therefore, people in collectivistic

cultures are expected to experience more socially engaging emotions and people in individualistic cultures are expected to have more socially disengaging emotional experiences. This proposal is partially supported by empirical findings (e.g., Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006; Scollon, Diener, Oishi, & Biswas-Diener, 2004).

In sum, individuals in various cultures usually differ in their emotional reactivity to different stresses and show different emotional responses. People holding more collectivistic cultural values are likely to be sensitive to interpersonal stresses and experience more socially engaging emotions, whereas people holding more individualistic cultural values tend to be more reactive to non-interpersonal stresses and experience more socially disengaging emotions. Moreover, collectivists are more likely to control and suppress their emotions than individualists, particular in social situations. This higher level of suppression in collectivistic cultures indicates potential differences in emotion management among people holding different cultural values.

Past findings suggest significant individual differences in the duration of emotional experience (e.g., Verduyn, Delvaux, Van Coillie, Tuerlinckx, & Van Mechelen, 2009). The duration of emotions may be predicted by personality trait factors (e.g., extraversion, neuroticism), contextual factors (e.g., the importance of the eliciting event), and individuals' regulation efforts (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991; Schimmack, 2003; Sonnemans & Frijda, 1995). In fact, emotion regulation is defined by some researchers as the ability to manage and modify one's emotional reactions to achieve goal-directed outcomes (Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004; Matsumoto, 2006). Thus, effective emotion management should be connected with a sooner recovery from aroused emotions, by the use of effective regulation strategies. For example, some regulation strategies (e.g., suppression, rumination) in the literature are usually associated with more negative emotion consequences than other strategies (e.g., distraction, reappraisal), such as longer lasting depressive symptoms, greater anger experience, and more cognitive perseveration (e.g., Ray, Wilhelm, & Gross, 2008; Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Fredrickson, 1993).

In addition to individual well-being, researchers have found that individuals' emotion regulation is associated with social adjustment consequences, such as interpersonal functioning, intimacy in close relationships, and marital satisfaction (Field, 1994; Gross &

John, 2003; Matsumoto, LeRoux, Bernhard, & Gray, 2004). These findings suggest that individuals' emotion management is not merely an individual effort, but a social act, and should be examined in social cultural contexts. For example, suppression is usually associated with negative emotional outcomes, but it can function in a prosocial manner in some situations, e.g. suppressing one's own anger to preserve a relationship with a friend (Tavris, 1984).

When social concerns are considered, it can help to explain some cultural differences in individuals' emotion regulation efforts in diverse societies. Previous findings show that in comparison with people holding individualistic cultural values, those holding collectivistic cultural values are more likely to suppress their emotional expression, particularly those which threaten their in-group harmony (e.g., anger) (Drummond & Quah, 2001; Gross & John, 2003; Matsumoto, Yoo, Hirayama, & Petrova, 2005). In the social cultural view, suppression is likely to be encouraged in collectivistic cultures, due to the concern about hurting someone else and the effort to preserve relationships and maintain social harmony (Wierzbicka, 1994).

Although suppression may help to maintain relationship harmony and to avoid negative effects in collectivistic cultures (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007; Huang, Leong, & Wagner, 1994), there is data suggesting that it could be an effective strategy for the regulation of activated emotions. In fact, researchers found that people in collectivistic cultures tended to use less effective emotion regulation strategies than those in individualistic cultures and might thus recovered more slowly from activated emotions. For example, Tweed, White and Lehman (2004) found in a cross-cultural study that Japanese students recalled more internally targeted control efforts (e.g., acceptance, waiting, distancing), but less positive reappraisal, confrontation and escape than their Canadian counterparts.

Moreover, researchers found that social events aroused stronger emotional responses as well as more self-esteem changes among Japanese students than among American students, due to the Japanese's sensitivity to social concerns (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Nezlek et al., 2008). Self-esteem reflects a sense of mastery over the environment which is closely connected with individuals' coping ability with stresses (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). These findings suggest thus a relatively difficult management

with aroused emotions, particularly socially disengaging emotions, among people in collectivistic cultures in comparison with those in individualistic cultures.

In sum, emotion management is both individual efforts to decrease activated emotions and social behavior to prevent valued relationships. These social concerns are more emphasized in individuals' emotion regulation process in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures, which may account for the higher level of emotion suppression among collectivists in the literature. Though suppression and other internally targeted control efforts may help to maintain relationship harmony, they are probably less effective to manage the aroused emotions and thus tend to be associated with a slower emotional recovery.

Overview of Studies in the Current Research

Previous studies found significant differences in how couples in diverse societies organize domestic tasks in a functional way to cope with their competing work and family demands, but failed to explain these cultural differences. Given that most cross-cultural studies adopted only theoretical models (e.g., time availability model, resource model, gender ideology model) which were developed in western societies, it is necessary to consider cultural values and social structure factors so as to explain individuals' behavior in one culture (e.g., eastern culture) from their own cultural view, instead of taking one particular view of another culture (e.g., western view; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, a shortage of knowledge about eastern cultures and other non-European and non-American cultures makes it difficult to understand cultural differences in such a cultural perspective.

A second weakness in previous family work studies is that they eclipsed assistance and support from other persons with domestic tasks, even though third party's support showed significant influence on husband's and wife's family work time in western societies (Brines, 1993; Cohen, 1998), and couples in eastern Asian societies were found to rely heavily on others' assistance with child care and other domestic chores, particularly the help from extended family (Chen, Short, & Entwisle, 2000; Logan & Bian, 1999).

These gaps in the literature call for attention to some questions that are important to understand couples' division of family work in collectivistic and individualistic cultures. For

example, a cultural perspective requires a good knowledge about people's traditional views regarding family and other social relationships in collectivistic cultures. Is it different from the views about marital relationship held by people in individualistic cultures? How do these differences in traditional values and views influence couples' daily family organization (e.g., domestic work contributions by husband, wife and other persons) in diverse societies? Moreover, the literature suggests that support from other persons reduces working couples' family work time in various cultures (Brines, 1994), but it is unclear how couples organize support from their network, for example, from whom they ask for help and from whom they finally receive support. A closer exploration into the couple's social support organization process is necessary to understand how culture shapes individuals' social behavior. Also, it is of interest how the support from other persons influences two partners' allocation of family work in collectivistic and individualistic cultures.

The Division of Family Work in China and Europe: On the Role of Culture²

The first study in this research reviewed the literature on couples' division of domestic tasks in China and Europe and suggested some potential predictors of these cultural differences. To explain these cultural differences in couples' division of family work, previous studies have developed some theoretical models (e.g., time availability, resource, gender ideology approaches) and adopted them in diverse societies. This study summarized some findings about the validity of these theoretical models in eastern Asian societies and discussed how traditions and social norms in Asian societies influence the functioning of these models. To understand these traditions regarding family in eastern Asian societies, we introduced in detail the specifications of two types of relationships (i.e., wife-husband relationship, individual-family relationship) in Confucianism, that are highly relevant to couples' family arrangements. Previous findings on third party's help with domestic work in western societies as well as in eastern Asian societies were also reviewed in this study and attention was given to their potential influence on husband's and wife's division of family

² The reference of this article is: Wang, Z., Schoebi, D., & Perrez, M. (2010). The division of family work in China and Europe: On the role of culture. *Advances in Psychological Science*, 18(10), 1668-1678.

work in these societies.

This article aims to review the literature on couple's allocation of domestic chores in China and Europe. First, the main findings of studies on Chinese couple's family work division are summarized, and discussed in comparison to data from European studies. Second, the review expands the theoretical framework adopted by most cross-culture family studies by providing a discussion of traditional Confucian ideology and its influence in the family domain. Thirdly, the article examines the applicability of major theoretical models about the division of family work on the situation in China. While we conclude that cross-cultural differences in the division of family work exist, these differences can only partially be explained using major theoretical approaches. We discuss the possible implications of cross-cultural differences in third party support with family work for the division of family work between spouses.

*Cultural Difference in the Division of Domestic Work between Chinese and Swiss Families:
On the Role of Support*

The second study in this research examined empirically the potential predictors of cultural differences in couples' daily division of family work, that are suggested in the first review study, using samples from China and Switzerland. Based on the literature, time availability and gender ideology models were expected to be valid in the two societies. Moreover, cultural values (i.e., collectivism vs. individualism) held by husband and wife and both spouses' daily received support were expected to help explain the potential differences in couples' allocation of family work in the two societies. The expanded framework makes it possible to provide new knowledge about cultural influence on couples' daily family organization.

This article aims to explain cultural differences in the division of domestic chores by Chinese and Swiss spouses. Besides time availability and gender ideologies, cultural values (family-centered collectivism and individualism) and support with family work are examined to understand spouses' family work allocation from a cross-cultural perspective. Electronic diary data from 182 Chinese and Swiss couples suggested that cultural differences existed in

the division of household labor, and that received support, paid work time and gender ideologies accounted for the difference. Chinese spouses' remarkable frequency of receiving support with domestic chores calls for attention in further research.

*Daily Support Across Cultural Contexts: A Comparison of Daily Support Experiences of Young Families in Four Cultural Contexts*³

The third study in the current research concerned about couples' daily support experiences in domestic domain in China, Portugal, Russia, and Switzerland. In comparison with previous studies, this study remarkably focused on the couple's support experiences to cope with their daily minor stresses, i.e. the competing work and family demands. More specifically, it pictured how couples in these four societies were similar with and different from one another in their need of support with family work, from whom they expected support, and from whom they actually received support. These strengths should help to show how culture shapes individuals' social support process in close relationships.

Previous studies suggest people in collectivistic cultures are more likely to suppress and control their emotion expression in social interpersonal situation than those in individualistic cultures, particularly the expression of socially disengaging emotions (e.g., anger) (e.g., Friesen, 1972; Matsumoto, 2006). This higher level of emotion control among collectivists is probably due to their social concerns that expression of socially disengaging emotions may hurt other persons in relationships and result in negative relationship consequences (e.g., Mauss et al., 2009). However, this proposal has not been tested in empirical studies. It is of interest, for example, whether people's emotional states in collectivistic cultures are more likely to arouse emotions of other persons in relationships than in individualistic cultures.

A second gap in cross-cultural emotion studies is the lack of knowledge about emotion management and recovery, or temporal dynamics of emotions after elicitation in

³ The reference of this article is: Schoebi, D., Wang, Z., Ababkov, V., & Perrez, M. (2010). Daily Support across Cultural Contexts: A Comparison of Daily Support Experiences of Young Families in Four Cultural Contexts. In J. Davila & K. Sullivan (Eds.) *Social Support Processes in Intimate Relationships* (pp. 335-359). NY: Oxford University Press.

various cultures. Some studies examined cultural differences in emotional responses at onset (e.g., Matsumoto et al., 1998) and others examined cultural differences in the use of emotion regulation strategies (e.g., Matsumoto, 2006). People in collectivistic cultures may show a slower recovery rate than those in individualistic cultures, particularly from socially disengaging emotions, due to their higher level of suppression of emotion (Mauss et al., 2009). It is possible that no difference exists, or even that a difference exists in the opposite direction, because of the potential moderator effect of culture on the function of suppression and other emotion regulation strategies (e.g., Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007).

*Affective Interdependence in Married Couples' Daily Lives: Are There Cultural Differences in Partner Effects of Anger?*⁴

Some questions will be answered in the fourth and the fifth studies in the current research. The fourth study focused on the interpersonal affective consequences of anger in close relationships in eight cultural contexts. More specifically, it examined whether a partner's anger had influence on the other partner's anger and sadness experiences at the next day, and culture was expected to be a moderator with stronger partner effect among people in collectivistic cultures or holding more collectivistic values on individual level than among those in individualistic cultures or holding more individualistic values. This study provides a direct test of the proposal that individuals' emotional experiences have more influence on others' emotions in relationships in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures and thus provide support for collectivists' emphasis on social concerns.

The experience of anger in close relationships can be detrimental. Existing research suggests cultural differences in how people deal with negative emotions. In particular, anger seems to play a more disruptive interpersonal role in cultures where collectivistic cultural values are strongly endorsed. Our goal was to examine whether differences in the interpersonal contingencies of anger across contexts and persons were linked to the endorsement of collectivistic values. We examined this possibility using electronic diary data,

⁴ The reference of this article is: Schoebi, D., Wang, Z., Ababkov, V., & Perrez, M. (in press). Partner effects of anger in close relationships: Are there cross-cultural differences in the dyadic co-regulation of anger? *Family Science*.

collected multiple times per day over the course of a week. Data were collected from 623 couples in eight cultural contexts. We performed dyadic multilevel analyses to examine partner effects of anger on experienced anger and depressed mood the next day, and whether these effects were moderated by cultural context and by the endorsement of collectivistic values. Results suggested that cultural differences existed. We found partner effects of anger in couples from more collectivistic cultural contexts, and in couples who endorsed collectivistic values more strongly. Overall, the results demonstrate that culture is intertwined with daily psychological processes in close relationships.

Stress and Recovery among Chinese and Swiss Couples

The fifth study in this research examined first Chinese and Swiss couples' affective sensitivity to a marital relationship stress (i.e., anger at the other partner because of the division of family work) and a non-relationship stress (i.e., perceived difficulty to balance work and family demands). Chinese husband and wife were expected to show stronger activated anger and sadness to the relationship stress but weaker aroused anger and sadness to the non-relationship stress than Swiss couples, given the emphasis on social concerns in collectivistic cultures while an emphasis on individual concerns in individualistic cultures. A second aim in this study was to explore potential cultural differences in emotional recovery after these stresses between Chinese and Swiss couples. Given the significant cultural difference in the use of suppression and other emotion regulation strategies between collectivists and individualists, Chinese couples were expected to show a slower recover from anger and sadness than Swiss couples in the relationship stress situation, but a similar fast recover from anger and sadness was expected among Chinese and Swiss couples in the non-relationship stress situation. Also, the socially disengaging emotion of anger and socially engaging emotion of sadness were expected to be associated with different recovery consequences in the two societies.

Past studies suggest that people tend to have different emotional experiences in various cultural contexts. The current article aims to examine whether cultural differences exist in individuals' emotional recovery as well as in their emotional responses. To reveal

cultural effect on couples' emotional experiences, we controlled emotion type and situation type, by assessing husband's and wife's socially disengaging emotion (i.e., anger) and socially engaging emotion (i.e., sadness) and distinguishing relationship and non-relationship stress situations. Our electronic diary data from 182 Chinese and Swiss couples suggested significant cultural differences in both emotional reactivity and emotional recovery. In relational stress situations, Chinese couples tended to report less anger and less sadness than Swiss couples, but they reported more sadness than Swiss couples in non-relational stress situations. Cultural differences in emotional recovery were found only in relational stress situations. Chinese couples recovered more slowly from aroused anger than Swiss couples. Our findings suggest that culture shapes individuals' daily emotional reactivity and recovery and call for attention to the roles of emotion type and situation type in revealing the cultural effect.

General Discussion

With women's increasing participation in the labor force, it is important to explore how working couples in diverse societies adjust to the stressful situation caused by these conflicting duties and demands in domestic and professional domains. Previous studies suggested that a functional organization of family work in family was critical to reduce working couples' family distress and to increase their subjective well-being and relationship quality (Coltrane, 2000; Mikula, 1998). How this organization is established has gained attention and some factors were found useful to explain husband and wife's division of family work, such as two partners' available time for domestic tasks, their attitudes and values regarding gender and family (Brines, 1993; Shelton & John, 1996). However, it is possible that these predictors are less powerful in collectivistic cultures with strong traditions and social norms (Kamo, 1994).

On the other hand, the literature documented that people's distressed emotional state due to work and family conflict was associated with negative family functioning and tended to result in emotional spillover in families (Barling & Macintyre, 1993; Repetti, 1994). However, less attention has been given to couples' emotional experiences and co-regulation under stress in various cultures, although a cultural effect has been found on individuals' emotional behaviors and experiences (e.g., Matsumoto, 2006).

The current research used diary data from eight cultural contexts to investigate how culture shapes couples' adjustment to daily stresses in work and family domains at two levels of family tasks organization and emotion management. The computer-based ambulatory assessment method employed ensures that the data have a good internal validity, and this approach also brings with it remarkable advantages in accommodating for memory bias over traditional questionnaires and even other kinds of diary assessment (e.g., booklet-based diary method). By reducing the time lag between event and recording to a minimum, the assessments are performed and recorded under the contextual conditions under which the behaviours, emotions and thoughts occur, and with a minimal probability that cognitive processing interferes with an accurate reporting (Klumb & Perrez, 2004). Beyond this

advantage, computer-assisted ambulatory assessment method in current research allows respondents' reporting only in a certain time period and automatically stores recording time, which avoids the possibility of delayed retrospective reports in other kinds of diary methods (Perrez, Schoebi, & Wilhelm, 2000).

Adjustment in Family Work Organization

To better understand couples' family work organization in diverse societies, the current research (Study 1) proposed an extended framework that considered the influence of third party's contributions and spouses' cultural values (collectivism and individualism) on their division of family work. Importantly, it provided a detailed introduction to Confucian values regarding gender and family in East Asian societies and discussed several mechanisms by which Confucian values and norms may influence couples' division of family work.

The results from the current research (Study 2) provide further support for the validity of time availability and gender ideology models to explain couples' division of household labor in collectivistic cultures (see also Shi, 2007). Moreover, the results showed that third party support was necessary to understand two partners' household labor division in the two societies. Chinese couples' higher rate of received support, as compared to that among Swiss couples, helped explain their relatively low rates of family work time, and importantly, explained why Chinese couples featured a more equal division of domestic tasks, while holding more traditional gender role attitudes, a phenomenon that cannot be explained by their professional work time (cf., Pan & Lin, 1987; Stockman, Bonney, & Sheng, 1995). Although spouses' cultural values did not show significant influence on their division of household labor in current research, they were correlated with two partners' gender ideologies and received support from other people. The current work calls for more attention to couples' support experiences in various cultures and their relationship consequences.

Social support is associated with individuals' subjective well-being in various cultures (Diener & Oishi, 2005), and its organization (e.g., sources, forms) varies across culture (Goodwin & Pillay, 2006). The current research (Study 3) makes an important contribution to the literature by illustrating that spouses' support expectations and received support in daily

routine situations reflect cultural values at social level as well as at individual level (e.g., Dunkel-Schetter, Sagrestano, Feldman, & Killingsworth, 1996; Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008). Our data showed that couples in collectivistic cultures expected and received more support than those in individualistic cultures. Moreover, people in collectivistic societies were more likely to seek and receive support from extended family and less likely from friends, as compared to people in individualistic societies. Given that couples' support experiences are characterized by cultural values, further studies should explore these support experiences' psychological consequences in various cultures, both at individual level and at relationship level in addition to couples' division of domestic work.

Adjustment in Emotional Experiences

The finding in current research (Study 5) provides further evidence of cultural effect on individuals' emotional responses to work and family conflicts, negative emotional spillover in relationship, and spouses' co-regulation of distressing emotions and recovery (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Matsumoto et al., 1998; Matsumoto et al., 2008). Our data showed that difficulty to balance work and family duties aroused more distressed emotions among Chinese couples, but the association was very weak among Swiss couples, which suggested that the impact of work and family conflicts on families vary across culture (Guelzow, Bird, & Koball, 1991; Marshall & Barnett, 1993). By contrast, the relational stress (i.e., anger at partner because of family work division) caused more negative emotional responses among Swiss couples than among Chinese couples, indicating a higher level of emotion suppression among Chinese couples due to the disruptive impact of relational stress on close relationships (Mauss et al., 2009).

The results in current research (Study 4) also confirm past findings of cross-over effects of emotion in close relationships (e.g., Crouter, Bumpus, Maguire, & McHale, 1999). Our data showed that one partner's anger impacted not only the other partner's anger at the next day, but also aroused other negative mood (e.g., sadness) in the other partner. Importantly, the finding suggested a cultural impact on the partner effect of emotions in close relationships. The wife's anger showed significant partner effect on their husband's

emotional experiences in three collectivistic cultural contexts but not in five individualistic cultural contexts. Stronger partner effect of anger was also found among spouses holding more collectivistic cultural values. These findings provide support for a higher sensitivity among people holding more collectivistic cultural values to events that may result in social interpersonal consequences (e.g., socially disengaging emotions) (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000).

The finding that people in diverse societies differed in their emotional responses to stress as well as in emotions' interpersonal consequences suggests different ways to manage and recover from aroused emotions in various cultures. Different from previous studies that usually focus on cultural differences in the use of various emotion regulation strategies (Matsumoto, 2006), the current research (Study 5) is of interest in how people in various cultures differ in their recovery from activated emotions. It examined cultural differences in emotional recovery rates using different types of emotions and stresses based on an interpersonal dimension to reflect collectivists and individualists' differential emphasis on social concerns. The results showed that Chinese and Swiss couples had similar recovery rates with negative emotions under non-relational stress (i.e., difficulty to balance work and family duties). Under relational stress, however, Chinese couples recovered more slowly from anger than did Swiss couples, but no cultural differences existed in couples' recovery from sadness. It therefore seems difficult for collectivistic people to manage anger in relational stress situations.

In sum, our data provide support for a cultural impact on individuals' emotional experiences in close relationship. As compared to people holding more individualistic cultural values, those holding more collectivistic cultural values were more likely to control and suppress their negative emotional responses to stress which is highly risky to their relationship harmony. Collectivists' frequent use of suppression seems necessary to maintain relationship harmony, given the finding that their anger experiences were more likely to arouse other person's negative emotions in relationships than individualists. However, emotion suppression resulted in a slower recovery from anger under relational stress among Chinese couples, as compared to Swiss couples. Valuable insight could be gained if future studies explored the benefits and costs of emotion suppression in various cultures (see also

Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007). The differential recovery rates of emotion may also reflect cultural differences in the use of effective emotion regulation strategies (Matsumoto et al., 2008) and probably even different co-regulation processes in relationships (Gable & Reis, 2001).

Limitations and Strengths

The findings in current research demonstrate how culture shapes individuals' daily family behaviors and emotional experiences in intimate relationships. However, these results need to be corroborated in further studies. Some limitations deserve particular attention. One limitation is the selection of samples. Our samples are not representative samples of populations in selected countries. They are convenience samples of young couples who have preschool-aged children and each spouse in which is professionally active. These findings should thus be generalized with caution to those couples not meeting the above mentioned criteria. For example, third party's support with family work may play different role in the division of domestic work among those working couples who are older and with low-income and less education, given that they are unlikely to use paid services to reduce domestic work load (e.g., Cohen, 1998).

Other limitations in current research concern the assessments of cultural values. The finding that cultural values at individual level were less powerful than those at sample level suggests that more effective assessments of cultural values be developed to capture the impacts of culture. For example, our Chinese, Portuguese, and Russian samples all scored fairly high on individualism while they scored simultaneously high on the scale of collectivism. One possibility is that some items in the individualism reflect the degree to which individuals independently make decisions (item example: when faced with a difficult personal problem, it is better, a person decides himself/herself what to do, rather than to follow the advice of family relatives). Thus, future study should use improved measures of cultural values, particularly the assessment of individualism, given the critical effect of culture on individuals' behaviors and emotions. Also, a more direct assessment of emotion (co-) regulation in close relationships might provide more insights into the cultural effect on

couples' emotional responses and recovery.

Nevertheless, the current research has strength. It used more or less parallelized samples of couples in eight different countries with respect to age, professional activity, and having at least one preschool-aged child, and thus provided a unique opportunity to examine cultural effect on a large scale of cultural contexts. The ambulatory assessment method used in current research assures a high ecological validity of our data. In spite of some limits in sampling, the current convenience sample is likely well-functioning and features restricted variance. Rather than producing artificial results, these sample characteristics might have affected the results and significance tests in a conservative manner. It is therefore even possible that replication of the current models in more representative samples might provide more pronounced effects.

Conclusion

Working couples' adjustment to stress in work and family domains depends on individual resources as well as social resources. The results in current study suggest that social contexts have important influence on these couples' family work organization and emotional experiences in relationship. Couples holding more collectivistic cultural values were more likely to seek and receive support from extended family and these support experiences not only reduced spouses' absolute domestic work time, but also impacted two partners' relative contributions to domestic tasks. A result might be an inadequate understanding of two partners' division of family work when third party's contribution is ignored.

The findings about emotional experiences extend the literature by showing that cultural impacts on emotion vary across situation as well as across emotion type. People in collectivistic cultures tended to report less negative emotional responses (i.e., anger and sadness) to relational stress, but not to non-relational stress, as compared to people in individualistic cultures. In addition, collectivist couples recovered more slowly from aroused anger than individualistic couples under relational stress. By contrast, two groups showed similar recovery rates with activated sadness under relational stress and with two types of

emotions under non-relational stress. Thus, collectivist couples' emotion management was less effective than individualist couples' management only when the regulated emotion was more likely to cause negative relationship consequences.

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Appendix

- Declaration of Authorship
- CV

Declaration of Authorship

Ich erkläre ehrenwörtlich, dass ich meine Dissertation selbständig und ohne unzulässige fremde Hilfe verfasst habe und sie noch keiner anderen Fakultät vorgelegt habe.

Wang Zhiyun

CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

- 1998.9 - 2002.6** Bachelor of Arts, Major in English language, **Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, P. R. China**
- 2002.9 - 2005.6** Master of Education, Major in Applied Psychology, **Beijing Normal University, P. R. China**
- 2006.4 - 2010.10** Major in Health Psychology, **University of Fribourg, Switzerland**

RESARCH EXPERIENCE

- 2002.9 - 2004.12** Participated in “Occupational Stress and Coping Study” sponsored by National Science Funds of China. Revised the Occupational Stress Scale for Employees in Enterprises and studied the moderating role of coping in the relationship of occupational stress and job satisfaction.
- 2002.1 - 2004.10** “Memory, Cognition and Emotion Development of Children” as one of the cooperators with Department of Human Development of Cornell University. Interviewed and recorded with more than thirty 3-year children and his/her mothers.
- 2003.10 - 2005.5** Revised the Coping Style Questionnaire and developed the Stress Situation Coping Style Questionnaire. Tested the two questionnaires and studied some problems in coping style study.
- 2006.4 - 2010.10** Participated in the project of Family Life and Professional Work: Conflict and Synergy in China and in Switzerland sponsored by University of Fribourg and in charge of the survey in China.

ACTIVITIES

- 2008.2** Participated in “5. Münchner Tagung für Familienpsychologie” in Germany and gave a presentation with the title of “Division of family work and its subjective evaluation by Chinese and Swiss couples”.
- 2008.8** Participated in two courses in Methods in the Social Science in the 12th Swiss Summer School: Multilevel models: Practical applications and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) I.
- 2008.9** Participated in “4th Congress of the European Society on Family Relations” in Finland and made a presentation with the title of “Desired and actual divisions of family work: Affective reactions by Chinese and Swiss couples”.
- 2009.8** Participated in two courses in Methods in the Social Science in the 13th Swiss Summer School: Applied Analysis of Variance and Linear Modelling and Case Studies: Design, Methods, and Reporting.
- 2010.9** Participated in “5th Congress of the European Society on Family Relations” in Milan, Italy and made a presentation with the title of “Stress and emotional recovery among Chinese and Swiss couples”.